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American and German university ideals

Sewanee, Tenn.

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American and German University Ideals

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American and German University Ideals

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DELIVERED AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH
SEWANEE TENNESSEE JUNE 30, 1904

BY

H.E. BARON SPECK VON STERNBURG

AMBASSADOR
FROM GERMANY TO THE UNITED STATES

SEWANEE TENNESSEE
The University Press
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AMERICAN AND GERMAN UNIVERSITY IDEALS

Right Reverend Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Gentlemen of the Board of Trustees, Scholars and Students of the University of the South:

AMONG the numerous honorable and pleasant duties that devolve upon me as the representative of the German Emperor to the United States, certainly none are more delightful and enjoyable than those which bring me into relationship with the universities of America. This hardly could be otherwise, because there the German feels the atmosphere of his own *Alma Mater*, who, as universally acknowledged, gave birth to the modern American university.

A few months ago the University of

Chicago celebrated the reciprocity of relations between the sciences of our two countries. This happy event remains of far-reaching significance in the history of our letters, especially as it was welcomed in personal messages by President ROOSEVELT and Emperor WILLIAM, America's and Germany's foremost scholars and educators. President ROOSEVELT, in dwelling on the achievements of German scholarship, said: "German ideals and German science have given the inspiration in our universities for the existing developments of research and investigation."

These ideals are the strong and harmonious expression of the most noble virtues of the German people. They are the same ideals which have become so dear to America, because much did they contribute to make her great and strong among nations.

The first academic relationship between the United States and Germany dates back

to the eighteenth century, the time when FRANKLIN was in close touch with two of Germany's leading centres of learning: Halle and Goettingen. In the following century the ties between America and the universities of Germany were considerably strengthened by some of the great minds of the new world —men like GEORGE BANCROFT, the historian, GEORGE TICKNOR and EDWARD EVERETT. On these men German university life made a profound and lasting impression. EVERETT openly proclaimed that America, in the development of her universities, should closely follow the lines taken by the German universities. I recall with much delight the many chats I had in the early days of my career with GEORGE BANCROFT, during our rides about Washington and in his Newport rose garden. The venerable gentleman loved nothing more than to wander back to his college days in Germany. He would dwell on the profound conscientiousness which the

German student displays in his literary pursuits and in the fulfillment of his duties, on his keen sense of independence in the solution of scientific and spiritual problems, on the fearless way he upholds his convictions, and on his untiring energy. He especially loved to dwell on the sunny side of the German student life, and on the happy way in which a sincere and truly literary view of life in the German *Alma Mater* is blended with an innocent and almost childlike delight in the most simple pleasures. The influence of GEORGE BANCROFT and his contemporaries soon increased the numbers of American students at the German universities. It is owing to these men, and not to German men of letters who visited America, that the main efforts to transplant the German university ideal on American soil came from the Americans themselves.

I should like to say a word here about those characteristics of German university life which

have most forcibly influenced the American universities, and which still are the most important factors in their future development. The older college of the United States, as we all know, held as its exclusive ideal general education. The result was that its main efforts were concentrated towards handing down existing knowledge and science from generation to generation. This naturally gave the college a most conservative character as regards the introduction of new subjects of study. But gradually the leading university men of America, the majority of which were closely connected with the universities of Germany, became firmly convinced that the time had come to expand. It was clear to them that if the American university continued to abide by its old ideals alone, the American student could never become a potent factor among those who were engaged in widening the world's intellectual and spiritual horizon. This could be accomplished only by inde-

pendence in scientific research. Hence the general demand arose to give the new German university ideal the same advantages. It was the German spirit which stepped in at this period with its vitalizing influence.

During the last decades the tendency in America towards the German university ideal has been strongly marked, and it has become especially noticeable in the selection of the men in whose hands has been laid the education of the student. Not only have these men proved themselves expositors of existing knowledge, but they must also be recognized as independent workers in the field of scientific research. For the education of the student both ideals are distinctly essential; the question is how to blend them in the most satisfactory manner so as to prevent the one from being curtailed by the other.

Like every institution, the university, above all, is forced to adapt itself to the demands of the time. Hence, in both our countries,

it has undergone and is undergoing a constant evolution — a process of taking what is of perennial strength in the old and combining it with adaptations to the new, thus creating a structure both modern and strong. Let me here repeat the words of President BUTLER:

"In order to become great — indeed, in order to exist at all — a university must represent the national life, and minister to it. When the universities of any country cease to be in close touch with the social life and institutions of the people, and fail to yield to the efforts of those who would re-adjust them, their days of influence are numbered."

Great have been the changes in social life during the last decades, especially in the United States and in Germany. The locomotive and the steel bridge have taken the place of the cannon and the rifle in expanding the spheres of nations. Our industrial forces are felt all over the world. They emanate

from our towns and cities, which have been turned into vast machine shops, and gigantic combinations have been formed of individuals and of capital. The salient question of the day has become: how to give men the best form of education so as to enable them to manage these combinations to the greatest benefit of their people. What is the relation of the university to these new conditions? What can the university do to render these interests more worthy of humanity and more helpful to the noblest and fullest life? On the other hand, what can the university do to make these business interests themselves more efficient, so as to assure their victory in the field of ever-increasing international competition?

The efficiency of the American educational system, which I have been able to follow closely during the last twenty years, must strike any student interested in the problems of education and of national economy most

forcibly. One of Germany's leading scientists and university professors, greatly interested in the scientific development of the United States, recently pointed out the marked progress of her universities. In some fields the Americans, he stated, were leading Germany — for instance, in chemistry, physics, and astronomy, for which they possess excellent institutes and teachers; also, in the theological and philosophical sciences they are showing marked progress. In announcing his intention to visit America, the professor stated that he did not come to teach the American people, but to learn from them.

What has especially impressed me during my visits to the American centres of learning is the large amount of money devoted to educational purposes. Some of their buildings are truly magnificent; all are equipped with the most approved lighting, ventilating, and sanitary arrangements. The professors and teachers are inspired with the keenest enthusiasm,

and among the students I noticed everywhere a deep and sincere longing for knowledge. The men whom your educational methods have developed show two distinct sides. They are men of profound learning and high academic attainments; but, at the same time, they possess the extraordinary initiative and organizing capacity of the qualified business man. They are ever ready to step into the arena of public affairs and give the people the advantage of their learning and experience in a most unselfish way.

Every American university, it seems to me, is built upon the motto: *Mens sana in corpore sano.* The spacious, airy lecture rooms, the palatial, well-equipped gymnasiums, the perfect playgrounds, the marble swimming pools, and the clubrooms and dining halls with their air of refinement—all this is inducive to cultivating the best physical health, without which the perfect mental equilibrium is impossible. Your keen interest in sports has produced and

is producing a virile race, self-reliant, with its best individual qualities developed.

As to the training and education the young man should receive, to bring out what is best in him to grapple with the new social conditions, there are, both in the United States and in Germany, certain doubts. Some men of fame and experience are pointing out that the university does not equip its graduates to be workers in the world's hard work; but these men, I am happy to say, seem to be in the minority. If we count the number of men of university training in the United States and in Germany during the last three decades, we clearly see that our people have made up their minds that higher education has come to stay. The proportion of persons of university training in these two countries, which are the most energetic in educational work, is ever increasing. We are now almost surprised to behold how slow we have been in casting off habits which now seem to us little

less than mediæval. If we hold fast to the sacred university traditions of the Fatherland which you have chosen as yours, we need not fear that this modernization of higher education will mean the loss of these traditions. There is no reason why scholarship should fall because industry and science are rising.

The best answer to the pessimist who warns his young friend to beware of the college—which retards and even cripples his career—is to look up the rolls of our leading universities and the account of the lives of their graduates. Neither here nor in my own country have I met a graduate who regretted his university education or the time spent in acquiring it. On the contrary, I have heard only expressions of regret by men who are members of the still amazingly large army of the untrained. Of course, boys who dislike study or who are indolent should never be selected for a higher education, which is apt to make them pessimists or social rebels. Whether a boy should

be prepared for a higher education or not is a personal question altogether.

Keep in mind that the accumulation of knowledge alone is of but secondary value as regards the advantages of a university education. Its primary value is in the acquisition of the power of thought, without which the full enjoyment of life is not possible. A trained mind teaches you to discern and appreciate better all that is noble and beautiful in life. It makes you more reasonable; above all, it teaches you self-control, wherein lie the success of the individual and the true greatness of the nation.

No man can have a more beautiful life before him than the young man of the South. As proverbial as are the splendid qualities of the Southern man displayed in war, just as proverbial is the beauty of the Southern landscape. The era of the prosperity of the South has arrived, and its latent treasures are being developed. Its finished

products of iron, steel, coal, coke, and cotton, are already reaching practically every market of the world. New capital is constantly being invested, new companies are being organized, and the older ones are increasing their capital stock. "Go South" is becoming the password among the able-bodied men landing on the shores of the new world and looking for work in the factory or on the farm.

It requires no prophetic eye to see the position the South will occupy after the Panama Canal has drawn the markets of the world closer to her factories and seaports and more intimately connected her with your great trade emporium in the Philippines, lavishly endowed with limitless raw materials. What you behold to-day seems to my eyes a mere shadow of what the future has in store for you. But you, my younger friends, have a vast field of work and great responsibilities before you. I am glad to be able on this

occasion to wish you well with all my heart, and to say one parting word to those among you who are preparing to face the life of strife: Follow the leadership which stands for the highest integrity, the most effective energy, and the most earnest patriotism in your country.

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